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A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT
FOR EVALUATING THE MEANING AND FUNCTION
OF ART

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God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Introduction: Why a Christian Context for Art?

It was the writer, Dorothy Sayers, who suggested that the Church hasn't made up its mind about the arts. In a way, this is an unfortunate fact. A language in which Christians can articulate an understanding of art can enhance an appreciation of its meaning and function for both the individual and the larger community. I believe there is a way of talking about art and aesthetics without imposing unnecessary limitations for those who find meaning in Christian life values. Art can be alternatively realized as sacramental, Incarnational, pointing to the New Creation, as shower-forth, sign, symbol, communication, shared experience, as poetic, critical, didactic, celebrative, dramatic, decorative, or simply expressive. As I see it, the main criterion for art in a Christian context is that its critics reflect its significance chiefly in terms of their own most cherished values, attitudes, and beliefs. Finally, art may point to what is of ultimate concern. An artistic expression or aesthetic technique need not be specifically "Christian" as is say, a statue of St. Francis of Assisi, a stained glass window, or an icon. It would seem that the criteria for the examination of art in a Christian context are many and possibly conflicting. Certainly historically the requirements have varied. The ideas listed above are varied, and it would be useful to get a

handle on them and establish points of commonality as well as of difference. It is probable that one cannot establish a concrete system of principles for art in a Christian context, but a descriptive language can give some perspective to the observer.

Before going further, it would be germane to define what it is I mean by art in the first place. I will be referring most specifically here to the plastic arts - painting - ,though by implication I hope to speak to the fine arts of music, architecture, poetry, dance, and the theater. I have chosen to focus on painting because it is of specific interest to me, and also because it functions well as an example of what most arts purport to do. It is a concrete example of a reflection upon some reality. It is unitive and expressive. In some cases, as in architecture, it is functional, used for a purpose. In most cases it is "intransitive," something in itself alone. It "gives form to something that is simply there, as the intuitive organizing functions of sense give form to objects and spaces, color and sound."¹ Aesthetic pleasure gives the satisfaction of discovering truth on the level of insight and attitude.² To put this idea in a generally religious perspective, art represents the *via positiva*, God apprehended through the medium of the created world.

"You don't look away from the world; you give yourself to it, and by your sacrifice to it raise it to the highest, a parable of eternity. We thinkers try to come closer to God by pulling the mask of the world away from his face. You come closer to Him by loving His creation."³

Art is material, sensual, affective, as well as cognitive.

It is essential that we differentiate art and aesthetics. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy, an evaluative discipline. It is problematic because it has no complete system of standards and principles, which thus is going to limit the definition of art itself. We will have to deal with aesthetics in discussing the evaluation of the meaning and function of art in a Christian context later on.

Owing that art is a problem to define, it is still worth taking a look at some of the conflicting definitions. Some seem to shift along with the process of cultural change. The general dictionary definitions attempt to express the essence: "the human effort to initiate, supplement, alter, or counteract the work of nature;" "the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, and movements;" "human works of beauty;" "a system of principles and methods;" "a trade or craft applying the system and specific skill in adept performance."⁴ No one of these definitions say all about art that has to be said. Aristototele defined art simply as an imitation of nature. G. Van der Leeuw sees art as not an imitation of things but of 'aesthetic experience.'

F. Schuon defines the highest (spiritual) art as having three criteria: "nobility of content, this being a spiritual condition, apart from which art has no right to exist; exactness of symbolism or at least, in the case of profane works of art, harmony and composition; and purity of style or elegance of line and color."⁵ In medieval art, an attempt was made to demonstrate the symbolic nature of things, particularly in painting. Art has been called "part of man, part of that unity."⁶ For William Spanos, "authentic Christian art celebrates the actual kinship that obtains between man and things, between subject and object."⁷

"Authentic Christian art" did not actually come into existence until around 200 A.D. The first role it played was as funerary images of the deceased, signs representing that these people had been baptized and had received communion, that they were members of the Kingdom of God by virtue of participation in the sacraments. This was the continuation of a tradition of depicting Old Testament scenes denoting a precedent for God's intervention among the faithful. Both kinds of art were prayers asking God to show the same mercy he showed Israel toward the person who is deceased.

But I hold that art does not have to be symbolic, necessarily, of some thing in order to herald the new creation or point to the Incarnation or be enjoyed. There is a good deal of contemporary art that does not say anything

intentional about the Incarnation but still can be appreciated in terms of Christian values. The fact that there was no real Christian art for at least 200 years simply demonstrates the elusive relationship that obtains between art and Christianity. They can be defined objectively as two different entities. They are both subject to inexplicable mysteries. Art existed a long time before Christianity, yet art is a medium which can be employed to relate the most profound Christian truths. Though no great tradition of painting need be a part of "Christianity," our very appreciation of the Incarnation is as unitive, healing, beautiful, pathetic, and rendering truth on the deep levels of affect and insight. Painting may bring us to those discoveries on a humbler level, but no less true.

"If aesthetic and religious emotions are often represented as being close to each other it is probably because they were bracketed together in the domain of purified enjoyment as opposed to impure enjoyment. And yet many a censor has denounced this excessive enjoyment of which art is the channel. Thus behind the efforts to purify the aesthetic emotion, intuition rightly unmasked, even as it castigated, the sensual source of art. For such is the ambiguous nature of art. It indubitably belongs in the spiritual heritage of mankind."⁸

Art has had its place not only in anamnesis, but since prehistoric times, in the religious sphere.

What is worth discussing here is whether art is a law or group of laws unto itself, or if it must almost necessarily be bound up with religion. Paul Tillich gives art and style

the important place in his exposition of theology of always implicating the larger whole - the cultural picture, and ultimately, Revelation. In a sense, this coincides with David Jones' idea of ars as shower-forth. But this is to be carefully qualified. All the pieces don't fit as neatly as one might imagine; art and the Church aren't in quite the tune the idealist would hope for.

"The Church, strictly speaking, does not create an art-form; she has used and given significance, or a new twist to, this or that cultural expression in differing connections. She can be either inimical to a particular creativity, or be an inspiration and patroness of its efflorescence. It depends on circumstances and conjunctions. As, in marriage she is witness to a sacrament, but cannot bestow it, still less determine in whom or when true love shall operate - so, in the arts she can encourage and bless, or not bless and neglect, but she cannot dispose in whom or where a new creativeness shall surprise the world and invigorate the generations."⁹

Still it is possible to look at all art as somehow implicitly reflective of God as creator. And, it has been as wildly characterized as "a series of iconoclasms". Dorothy Sayers' view of artistic creation gives it unlimited sanction in the eyes of God, without entirely ruling out the existence of evil, which is ultimately redeemed.

"The fact, however, that 'all activity is of God' means that no creative Idea can be wholly destructive: some creation will be produced together with the destruction; and it is the work of the creative mind to see that the destruction is redeemed by its creative elements."¹⁰

For some, this may be a tough idea to swallow. The creative mind as mirror of a Holy Trinity of God the Idea, Christ the Expression, and the Spirit as energy is a beautiful notion, but perhaps to take it in without due reflection would be a mistake.

It may well be true that the foundations of art do lie in the realm of the spiritual, or the Spirit. There seems to be a point of "disappearance of tolerance" for artists, historians of art and philosophers of aesthetics where the hope for a complete system of evaluation and knowledge of artistic technique, meaning, and function breaks down. The key area of breakdown seems to be around the idea of the expression of feelings; the expression in the painting itself, in the appreciation of it, and in the feelings that initiate the ensuing judgments. How do feelings make art meaningful, thrilling, "moral?" They seem to have everything to do with it, and the making of it. If we are going to talk about the meaning, morality, function and feeling of art, then as Christians, we almost have to understand it in a religious context, allowing that the above categories are related to spirit - at least the human Spirit.

If we were talking about art as technique and objective "integrity" - that is, what mechanically involves the making of art, on one level it may appear that art is an entirely different matter than what concerns the realm of the

religious, yet in a profound sense the integrity of a work of art gives meaning, function, value, morality - pleasure in itself, and may thus have ultimate spiritual meaning. It reflects in some way the unitive nature of God's creation. The point of "disappearance of tolerance" is the point at which we try to find a closed system of language to describe how technique, idea, expression, feeling and function actually come together as an integrity reflective of an essential mystery. Somehow, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The "whole" we are talking about is the full integrity of the work. This paper is about looking at that integrity from a "Christian" point of view. This means as Christians we observe certain referents which are expressed through the medium of art, for art is a medium, and because it is so, it embodies the message, it can be the message. Hence the sacramental nature of some kinds of art, the showing-forth nature of others, the prophetic, the poetic, the iconoclastic nature of still others, and yet the useful nature of some kinds of art. If some works of art express disintegration, we have a point of view about it: it speaks to the audience. The audience must come to a decision about it.

The Church has exhibited different attitudes toward art at different times in history. Art has always been well accepted in the area of teaching morals explicitly. Sometimes the Church has fostered the training of artists and

housed the most elegant examples of painting, sculpture, music, and poetry. As David Jones has said, it just depends on a variety of circumstances. Yet it was the great master, Albrecht Durer, nurtured by Church and society in his training, who said that the power of the artistic creation is a mystery that comes from above, by the grace of God. Art is above all revelatory to him. Dorothy Sayers would call this the imaging forth of Incarnation. My mind even wanders to the psalms, the prophetic works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, as I think of such imagings forth. Perhaps just a musical work, or the way a leaf is twisted in a flower arrangement.

The highest or most profound art is revelatory, it would seem. It judges other kinds of art which may be purely propagandistic or presentational. It demands recognition, but not necessarily the prescribed behaviors, say, that would be implied in the exercise of art in the Platonic view of the state. Perhaps it is true we still have to struggle, as Sayers has observed, with the reconciliation of a dichotomy between a pagan aesthetic and a Christian theology. Is there any room for reconciliation? A view of art as a necessary, true expression and communication of a primarily sacramental vision of reality may be the "key" to such reconciliation.

"...Christ's assumption of the body of man either redeems the things of this world (including the flesh), which had been corrupted by the Fall, or redeems man's spirit, thus allowing him once again

to perceive the spirituality of time and temporal things. In either case, at this point of intersection man and nature are reunited with the transcendent from which they had been separated, and their dignity, their importance, is therefore restored. Existence reassumes meaning. The Incarnation, in other words, in redeeming nature, in simultaneously giving intrinsic worth to and informing it with transcendent meaning, makes possible, indeed demands the sacramental vision of reality."¹¹

All art, then, is evaluated, informed, given meaning, through the existence of the redeeming nature of the Incarnation, just as is, in effect, the rest of creation. This would presuppose that Greek humanistic art participates in the process, too. Even that which appears the most ugly and grotesque may share in this power....if we believe the Kingdom of God has been established and is in the process of unfolding. In fact, perhaps that is the function of some of the most monstrous examples of modern art: the ability to show to the rest of the world the "perversity" of what is "disorganized" and "unbalanced."

"Monsters are not the only means by which the harmful state of human affairs is pictured. Much modern art uses distortion, interference, contradiction, mutilation, crutch, and carcass. It cultivates paradoxical combinations of heterogeneous objects. All these can be interpreted as displays of man-made disorder that could and should be remedied by man...Compositional order testifies to the functioning of a mind healthy enough to diagnose illness."¹²

The holy or healing value of this kind of expression is self-evident. But can we still say that an art which uses materials, forms and compositions that are most nearly pure

is a higher, more unitive art?

If so, is art ultimately to help bring humanity to a higher spiritual consciousness? That is, does not art through its seemingly intransitive nature take us beyond the teaching of behaviors and observations to the teaching of a love of creation and of God? I hold that it can do no else. An art which is made only to preserve the status quo of a political state or religious sect or cultural setting is at worst idolatry, and at best it falls short of expressing the true nature of a redeemed creation, a man and community loved by God, engaged in giving expression to this knowledge and thereby preserving and nurturing this creation. A work of art which is worshipped in itself is idolatry also. Art is only mimetic, and because it is so, in itself it cannot be worshipped: for as such, it is nothing. What it embodies and how it is made is important.

This then, is what characterizes the difference between a higher and lower art, what it points to. It has nothing to do with objective beauty, structure, or superiority of technique alone, though all of these things may contribute. Higher art simply points to truth in a clearer, nearer manner. And that truth is experienced affectively, through the senses. In effect, it would be difficult to define what makes "higher art." The experience of art which speaks to its time - and through that medium to all time - may be one of the important criteria.

But essentially this paper is not to make a point about higher art. The real question is, what is the nature of the relationship between art and God and Man? Having assumed the relationship of God and man in specifically Christian theological terms, I assign art important value in expressing man's discovery of relationship to the creation, to God's redeemed creation. How this relationship to God may be true of all or at least some art is the thing we are trying to talk about. I am referring to any art, whether Christian or not. Obviously, it would be less useful to talk about ancient Aztec art than contemporary western or oriental art for that matter, because Christianity does exist in a temporal and spatial continuum, and we are trying here to relate art and its problems to a contemporary Christian understanding of experience.

Assuming then that the presence of the Kingdom is a reality, whether we may know it directly or not, but that we accept it, what has art said about it? What does art say about man? Is it helpful, a hindrance, or part of a blueprint of the coming Revelation? Who can say...measurements are almost meaningless here. But again, it would be useful to be simply descriptive, in a historical manner as much as theoretical. We can establish our own language. To talk about the relevance and relation of art to the people of God I have arbitrarily chosen several areas of concern that

could be considered Christian attitudes, values, and beliefs.

In the following pages I plan to explore the realm of the prophetic or visionary as it concerns art, for those areas seem to have some roots in Judeo-Christian biblical writing. The second chapter will be devoted to a consideration of the sacramental nature of art. In the third chapter I will discuss the social-critical value of art in a Christian context, and in the fourth, the utilitarian possibilities of art in the Christian community. The fifth area I plan to discuss is the expressive, growth oriented value of the making, experiencing, and sharing of art.

Aestheticians have tried to handle logically the inter-related problems of discussing the techniques of art, the artist's creation itself, and the relation of art to the community. I say this can't be done systematically, and I have chosen five arbitrary points of departure. But the Christian believer may be able to look at the three problems and observe that the somewhat haphazard interrelationships are only healthy, even though debateable, even though one must try very hard to sharpen one's understanding of the spiritual function of art in as precise terms as possible.

For it may be entirely true that art is work as much as it is play, and it too will be judged by virtue of how it points to that which is of ultimate concern. But we may not yet know what is to be kept and what is to be cast off,

for that is the work of God when the time comes: "O Worship
the Lord in the beauty of Holiness, Let the whole earth stand
in awe of Him."

I

Prophetic Vision and the Visionary

Artist

"To leap in thought along the line of a hill
or on to a cloud, is to be there in imagination."

William Blake¹

"The people that walked in the darkness have
seen a great light."

Isaiah 7:4

A very important visionary artist, William Blake, once described Christianity as the "liberty both of body and mind to exercise the divine arts of imagination, imagination the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow. Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly and publicly before all the world in some mental pursuit for the building up of Jerusalem."²

To Blake the imagination is key in the call to belief. The exercise of imagination implicates what is to come in some significant way. Such is the view of one artist. The American poet, Wallace Stevens, simply states that naturally, there is a "universal poetry" that is reflected in everything. Both men imply art and poetry function as kinds of epiphany in life, a pointing to that which is essential, perhaps ultimate. Both do this in different ways. Blake's feel for

the call to that which is of ultimate concern is emphatic, urgent. The poet in Wallace Stevens does not give the feel of the same hurry as Blake, but of recognition. Perhaps Stevens' concern with the Kingdom is not as specifically delineated. Nevertheless, it is there, equally true.

"Pictures, poems and music can become objects of theology, not from the point of view of their aesthetic form, but from the point of view of their power of expressing some aspects of that which concerns us ultimately in and through their aesthetic form."³

The purpose of exploring art as prophetic vision is to determine what kinds of art may be considered prophetic in a clearly Christian way, and what kinds of art may be considered "showers-forth" without necessarily preaching Christian salvation or revelation. Then we may have to ask the question, is there really a difference in the long run? Then again, perhaps we will be able to leave that open. Perhaps all prophecies and visions may make their own claim on reality - to be judged ultimately by experience.

The first "prophetic visions" I remember knowing about were the ones I learned about in Sunday school and church. I saw them depicted in the woodwork, in pictures in Bible stories, heard about them; that is, the visions that were not my own. The very first prophetic visions I experienced were probably my own dreams, very important stuff indeed. But the pictures of Jacob and the ladder, Ezekiel and the wheel, Mary and Gabriel, Adam and Eve in the

garden, the Death and Resurrection - not to mention countless others, gave shape to the preoccupations of my own imagination. The child is urged to reproduce these in Sunday school activities. So many of these visions have remained vivid with me, and they became most vivid in my years studying the history of art and Scripture. They are reinforced and thrust into new contexts by experience.

Painting, sculpture, poetry and other forms of the written and spoken word, as well as theatre, give shape to the vision. I imagine Jacob's dream itself is a work of art, an integral work of the imagination, delivered by the grace of God. William Blake and Albrecht Durer, both remarkable artists, considered the fruits of their labors to have been fundamentally inspired by God. Blake was constantly aware of a kind of dialogue with God, and his poetry and artistic visions testify to this.

I have two ideas about "prophetic" vision, then. Art as prophetic shows forth or prepares by making the most of the present situation. The heightened moment, the issue illuminated, embodied, gives a taste of some essential, ultimate reality. First, the work may specifically preach or urge a response or responsible action, or second, it may simply produce an intuition, the good and truth of which will exist in the experience itself. A landscape, still life, life study or lyric poem is bound to have the latter

effect, while such works as the Guernica mural, the "Four Quartets" of T. S. Eliot, the sermon, the poetry of G. M. Hopkins, and painting representing the life of Christ is bound to have spiritual impact upon the Christian observer and his or her actions.

What seems to be real in both cases is that the human imagination itself is prophetic. Certainly we can only know the "real world" through our senses and cognitive faculties. We may arrange and rearrange material that somehow corresponds with the "real world" which seems to be in a state of rearranging itself.

The reason I placed this chapter on the prophetic aspect of art before the chapter on the sacramental nature of art is that though both kinds of art undoubtedly act as "showers forth," the idea of prophetic vision precedes the reality of the coming of Christ and His Kingdom in time. Yet it is these visions that first call the people of Israel to attention through the universal yet timely metaphors which seem to point in the necessary directions. If, as R. B. Y. Scott has said, the spiritual essence of the Old Testament is to be found not only in the piety of the psalms, which are usually metaphorical, but in the religion of prophecy, we have a clue as to the basic significance or prophetic visions - and what they implicate. Amos, Hosea, Hezekiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah - perhaps they did not know why

or how they were called or even how to edit their messages. But it is clear that they received some intuitive understanding of truth going beyond the ordinary perception of appearances. They apprehended what was universally true about human and religious realities. The vivid poetry of the Old Testament witnesses how they helped guide the people of Israel. Without the poetry and images, the credibility would be low.

The modern prophet sees beyond the apparent, too. William Blake observed in the 18th century the kinds of industrial changes that would wreak havoc in England. He also saw that this was a demonstration of the result of man's somewhat self-imposed separation from God - the outcome of the "mind-forged manacles." But Blake's poetry and imagery penetrate beyond the surface to the universal truth of God's love and care for His creation and mankind. All his work teems with a sense of God revealing to man, woman and child His care - in all their doings, wherever they are. Few can depict the sense of the shame of Cain, the power of God, the wonderment of the enrapt prophet, the travail of Job, more clearly than Blake. Almost inexplicably, Blake's work calls the observer to new understanding, perhaps new action.

The technique of El Greco is vastly different, yet his painting seems to be inspired by his own mystical vision. He determines to embody in his images the Spanish religious

fervor of his time. The otherworldly figures shimmer, slightly elongated, in the stormy setting of this world (c.f. Toledo, The Scourging of Christ).

Most art depicting the life of Christ - as the body of Medieval and Renaissance painting does - may be classified as telling a prophetic story, pointing to that which is of ultimate concern. This is true whether the work stands behind the altar, in a great museum, or in hanging in someone's livingroom. But the prophetic meaning of modern, secular art may be harder to identify and interpret. In the twentieth century, diversification seems to be the password. It is as possible to show what is of ultimate concern by using a symbol as by using something which hints an opposing reality. That is to say, a mountain of garbage may become a work of art when it states "this is the world when it did not know love." That is, if the artist wishes it to say that. The artist may have no seeming intention. The work may still make a statement.

I am particularly fond of Picasso's declaration that art is a horde of destructions. I think he means that we now live in an age where no one image provides any kind of answer or single correspondence to a reality. We experience, in a film, a series of images, a process. Any painting itself becomes a part of a larger process. It points to something new: it will be judged or changed by the new. Walter Ong

has suggested that the poet is bewildered in the modern age by a cosmological crisis in which time is discovered as extremely important, recurrence is not so important. Things can change and end in a different way than they began, with planning. Perhaps man himself becomes actively caught up in prophetic movement.

All this does not mean that symbols lose their meaning - perhaps it means they obtain full realization of their meaning in this process. Nevertheless, it seems that the idea of an age of process corresponds to the idea of what prophecy inspires: movement toward a significant, ultimate goal. One image is let go and succeeded by another.

I have said there is a difference between the prophetic vision and the human work of art which may depict it. This is quite an important point, as a fixed image only describes a reality in a given or limited way. Gerardus Van der Leuw in a chapter of The Holy in Art, "The Fixation of an Idea as a Holy Image," has said "Representation as the freezing of the stream of life is a religious act which can be transformed at any moment into the opposite."⁴ A valid warning. On the other hand, such a representation has important cultic value in confining an event "in a second form, thereby assuring its renewed presence and the effectiveness of its power."⁵ The image is seen as (quite literally) petrified movement - like Christ at Golgotha. The crystallized

image - art - is realized as holy from a Christian perspective in placing the beginning of theology with Christ, not God, and with redemption, not creation, according to Van der Leeuw.

The value of a prophetic art is in its pointing to redemption, even if such art preceded that moment in time, and in its pointing beyond, perhaps to Revelation. Modern art in its many shapes and guises is wildly prophetic - of sacred and profane, of that which will be kept, and that which will be cast off. Jacques Maritain has said that all genuine art is Christian, an opinion not unlike Dorothy Sayers.

"Everywhere art - whether Egyptian, Greek, or Chinese - has attained a certain level and a certain degree of purity; it is in expectation already Christian, because all spiritual radiance is the promise and image of the divine weighing out of the Gospel."⁶

At any rate, this is the hope, the hope to which art may in its many forms give shape.

"I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, 'Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and Smyrna and to Pergamus and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'"

"Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe

and with a golden girdle round his breast, his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow, his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength."

Rev. 1:9-11, 12.

The passage goes on to explain what all these fantastic images of the divine are to mean to the people of God, the members of the Kingdom. The context and meaning of those images must have built up their importance over a period of time to a collectivity of people. These people must have trusted the power of the imagination, and above that the power of God's divine guidance and grace. Here enters then for a Christian the necessity of feeling the "liberty both of body and mind to exercise the divine arts of imagination... the real and eternal world of which this...universe is but a faint shadow." This freedom gives the Christian every opportunity to "engage himself openly and publicly before all the world in some mental pursuit for the building up of Jerusalem" in his or her own way.

"The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule and Deformity, and by these I shall not regulate my proportions; and some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination Itself. As a man is, So he sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you

say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in this world. To Me this World is all One continued Vision of Fancy and Imagination and I feel Flattered when I am told so. What is it that sets Homer, Virgil and Milton in so high a rank of Art? Why is the Bible more Entertaining and Instructive than any other book? Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination, which is Spiritual Sensation, but mediating to the Understanding or Reason? Such is true Painting, and such was alone valued by the Greeks, and the best modern Artists."⁷

II

The Sacramental Nature of Art

"As Malcolm Mackenzie Ross has observed, the Incarnation, 'respecting as it does both the divinity of the Word and the humanity of the flesh,' implies a sacramental aesthetic, an aesthetic that assumes the organic wholeness of the artistic imagination and of the orders of experience that are its objects."¹

The fact that the whole of creation is redeemed by virtue of the Incarnation means that there is a new integrity abroad. That "art" which specifically aims to represent the remembrance of the Christ-event and does it most successfully takes place in what the Church calls anamnesis. Church members and clergy participate in a play - the Eucharist - in which the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ are remembered, and in which all Christians symbolically partake as members of the mystical body of Christ, with the bread and wine. Whether done as simply or as elaborately as possible, the sacrament of Holy Communion may be described as a drama, an "artistic" representation of a profound reality. But "artistic" demands being taken seriously as thoroughly sacred in this sense; to my mind art must be understood as always potentially sacred, in that it invokes, through remembrance and representation, a new reality from an old reality. In some way it speaks to the power of God and things of ultimate concern. The potential sacredness is realized in the fact of redemption.

Man is probably an artist, a signmaker, an imitator, by nature. Signmaking and imitation are the beginning of communication. The placing of signs in the Eucharistic service is of absolute necessity. By what other means does fleshly man have the option to communicate with, about, God? Certainly it was by the use of and placing Himself in the order of signs that Jesus communicated to His disciples. Think how loaded our own small communications become.

"Some man known to the reader may indeed appear to escape from all that is commonly or vulgarly meant by the 'sacramental', but no sooner does he put a rose in his button-hole but what he is already in the trip-wire of sign, and he is deep in an entanglement of signs if he sends that rose to his sweetheart, Flo; or puts it in a vase by her portrait, and he is hopelessly and up to his neck in that entanglement of Ars, sign, sacrament, should he sit down and write a poem 'about' that sweetheart. Heaven knows what his poem will really be 'about;' for then the 'sacramental' will pile up by a positively geometric progression. So that what was Miss Flora Smith may turn out to be Flora Dea and Venus too and the First Eve and the Second also and other and darker figures, among them no doubt, Jocasta."²

The author of this superb example of the power of the sign goes on to argue the impossibility of denying "that Ars was involved in what was done at the Supper and it is no less impossible to deny that what was done was done in anticipation of the events of the morrow."³ The power of those signs is identified with the Real Thing by us who call ourselves Christians. We identify them by analogy, and the rest is done by nature and God and magic, it seems,

sometimes. As long as we humans continue to be by nature artistic - or at least "signmakers," we will continue to need to remind ourselves of things with signs and symbols.

It is my understanding that the way we manipulate these signs and symbols may change, but they themselves serve to remind us of significant realities. The prophet or visionary is perhaps gifted in knowing how to arrange these signs, how to relate them or set them down as universally meaningful to a group at a given time. An artist makes a composition in the same way. He combined imagination with the flexible use of a given set of rules, and says something - or shows something - as in a painting - significant to his audience. The liturgist does the same in preparing for the celebration of the Eucharist. The priest is the emcee or the host; he makes sure that the experience is delivered, and his presence carries the importance of the signs as he passes and makes ready for the sharing of the bread and wine. If he gives a sermon, he steps into a slightly different role: he is explicator, interpreter and poet, as well as proclaimer of the Good News. His presence and his gestures are loaded heavily with signs in the Church service.

The kind of artist that liturgist and priest are called to be is perhaps "shower-forth" - perhaps not primarily concerned with aesthetic beauty, but with truth. He is aware of certain orders of things, but he also has the freedom to let his "art" be everything from beautiful to

sacred.

"To a great extent sacred art ignores the aesthetic aim; its beauty arises chiefly from its spiritual truth and so from the exactitude of its symbolism and from its usefulness for purposes of ritual and contemplation, and only secondarily from the imponderables of personal intuition."⁴

Perhaps the Christian liturgist and priest are called as "artists" as much as pastor and witness to word and sacrament. Particularly if we acknowledge that man is by nature the artist.

What is meant chiefly here by the "sacramental nature of art" is the relation of art to the new redeemed creation. It is symbolized to me chiefly in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. But as has been reflected earlier in this paper, the Church as institution cannot be labelled as responsible for art and its developments, nor does it have the power to generate any new creativeness of itself. It has alternately chosen to encourage or discourage art, and the reasons for this seem complicated. Perhaps it is the church as institution's relation to the rest of society that has limited its freely functioning and fostering the cultivation of art. But perhaps it is due to a limited perspective on the meaning and possibility of art in the first place. It is not worthwhile trying to simply place the blame. It would be worthwhile to further search out the possibilities as they grow.

In a world where it becomes increasingly difficult to

communicate truth through "rational dialogue," art presents itself as one of the greatest potentials for transcending that failing. It always has. But perhaps the Christian who understands the power of art can be of utmost help in bringing the potential to fruition. To my mind three real options present themselves. The Church may or may not ever choose to address itself to these three possibilities, but artists as individuals or in collectives or in conversation or in Christian unity can. First, art may make a powerful critique on social and political practises. Anyone knows this who knows how careful the U.S. (or any) government is about what music, plays or artwork are performed or sanctioned in its behalf. The concerned "Christian" artist may want to risk taking the challenge for the sake of truth. The second possibility for hope that art represents is in the utilitarian sphere. People making things and exchanging things together - from birthday cakes to clothes, furniture, to machinery to shelter presents a significant alternative to a rash impersonal mass culture in which the term integrity has little meaning. Thirdly, the learning and practise of artistic work has its educational potential. It can teach us to be more aware, expressive, caring, sharing. It can help us pave the way in the building up of Jerusalem. In fact, going on the evidence of art as sacramental in nature, it probably will. But it won't solve everything.

III

The Social and Critical

Value of Art

"I don't know how humanity stands it
with a painted paradise at the end of it
without a painted paradise at the end of it
the dwarf morning glory twines around the grass blade
magna NUX animae with Barrabas and two thieves!"¹

The practise and cultivation of art will not alone solve human problems probably because it is a mystery in itself. "Solve" is meant here in the terms of rigid scientific thinking. Hands, voices, groups guided by something more than human genius, systems, and techniques, perhaps the Holy Spirit, represent redemption itself at work - ultimately, we surmise. Yet humankind has choice, more than just a voice. Humankind has the option of helping shape the future by decision, by plansmaking, and by letting art open the mind and heart in that enterprise. This represents a great "leap of faith." But there are no proofs of exactly where those choices will lead.

"It is difficult to prove statistically one way or the other just how much influence the artist has on reality. For there will always be only a small gap between the artist and his public. Both are part of the same culture, which is moving forward. Where to?"²

Somehow that small "gap" represents an important dynamic. It could be the place for a shared value to take root. The artist says what the audience thinks but is having

a difficult time articulating for a variety of reasons.

a) The truth is dangerous. b) The audience has not recognized the truth for what it is or has deluded itself. c) Recognizing truth may mean a call for change. The artist may say what the audience hardly dared to think. Or, the artist may choose to avoid or conceal the truth. Still, it is true that the art of one age collectively prepares us for the thought and habits of the next: it may be working at breaking down the illusions of the present. The Enlightenment gave way to the Victorian age, and overly repressed victorian behavior gave way to the visions of realism and naturalism in bourgeois culture. Traditionally works of art - painting, music, theatre and writing, have served as signposts heralding, commenting on, urging or criticizing the social ebb and flow. What I am trying to suggest is that art be examined as not only about society and politics, but part of society and politics. It is part of the work of growing, expressing, interacting and building in itself. The artist's experience of alienation from a culture only represents a kind of poverty in that culture. On the other hand, if the artist only reinforces the dominant voices of a totalitarian situation, it is unlikely that new truth is communicated. A tension between the creative spirit and maintenance of an established order seems to be western culture's inherited reality, to speak broadly.

The purpose of this chapter is not to speculate as to

the reasons why there is a tension between the world of art and that of institutional realities. The purpose is to see how the creative spirit has been and can be more useful to members of society. The creative spirit, to my mind, denotes a recognition of and allegiance to change, movement, and growth. The form this spirit takes in a work of art may refer to revolutionary change, and it may not. It may see change as exactly that which is to preserve those values which have lasting meaning.

"Van Gogh believed in reality, but painted only his personal reaction, hoping to reach to a deep and general truth, and longing to bring joy to ordinary people, for he was strongly attracted to the ideals of socialism, as were most of the impressionist and post-impressionist painters. In this their politics were consistent with the aims of their art: both left wing socialism and their art were developing on the foundation of the basic ideas of the Enlightenment and, in the case of politics, from the ideas of the French Revolution."³

I am not trying to suggest that art necessarily must align itself with some political stance. Conceivably it could use symbolic aspects of a political conviction to point to a deeper truth. But representing only a powerful ideology or leader's wishes usually results in the use of rigid, unbeautiful cliches. Student "movement" art of the late 1960's was extremely bare and cold. I was aghast at the television broadcast a few years back of the Red Chinese Ballet. It was an absurd combination of a delicate, if restrained discipline with pantomime of guerilla warfare.

To me this was macabre, and represented a stunted version of humanity. The Russian nationalist composer of the early 20th century - such as Stravinsky - was forced to use strong national folk tunes as motifs, which ultimately became a severe creative limitation. The notion adopted in western culture that art was (or is) to be rigidly employed only for the betterment or enforcement of the political order was Plato's, originally; it is an idea that seems to have stuck in the craw of what we call civilization, mostly for worse.

Plato suggested that art was basically bad for human character. In fact he placed the poet and artist outside society in The Republic: he saw them as anarchists and spinners of lies. The integrity of a work of art had no perceived relation to the integrity and well being of larger society. But the assessment of art by Aristotle, whom we also take seriously, was quite the reverse: he saw art as beneficial to both individuals and the community. In fact it seems the justification for art for him pointed directly to the edification of the social order. In the Theater, catharsis by sharing the hero's experience of peripeteia and anagnorisis (reversal, following recognition) was seen as productive of emotional cleansing and urging some reformation of behavior. And as far as I have been molded to judge, he was right. We are urged, as in Oedipus, to learn by the example of a great tragic hero, and not by simply repeating the same errors ad nauseum. Still, it seems that the arguments

among and by classical Greek philosophers implied an important, necessary tension - at least! - between the work of art and the ideals of society, even if only to reinforce those ideals.

In my estimation this is the way we have traditionally accepted the role of art: to beautify, to exemplify, to challenge, to move to good action. These ideas are articulated by Aristotle and have carried in western culture. It was the Roman Virgil who wrote the poem "Ars Poetica" which links rhetorical rules for poetry with the making of a painting: "Ut pictura poesis." Sometimes we forget that painting was bound to very specific rules. In the middle ages and the Renaissance art came to be the tool for representing spiritual things, God's power and good and care: very lofty material intended for highly developed techniques and visual thinking. Beauty was a real concern, especially for the sake of trueness of spiritual quality. Modern impressionist and post-impressionist painting is appreciated largely on the basis of the "aesthetic" experience itself. The traditional idea of "rhetoric" as a set body of rules has been tossed out.

It is difficult to limit the social purpose of art to decoration or teaching or pure pleasure. There seem to be so many other things that are involved, and yet those other things, as with the above expressions of art, are hard

to define in their relation to art qua art. Somehow the process of the making of art is the extending of personal vision into the social arena. The artist must create and separate himself - herself from that creation in the process of sharing it. The artist is usually preserving a satisfying vision or motif handed down to him/her, as in folk art, or reorganizing ideas or presenting fresh material. Needless to say, the work has universal meaning of some kind because it is a work of special integrity - a demonstration of worth, meaning. Because I see art as a combination of vision and "special gift" together, I don't completely agree with what H. R. Rookmaaker has to say about the artist's task.

"The artist, with his special gifts, has a specific task, a very special and wonderful calling. It is not to play the prophet, nor to be a teacher, nor to be a preacher, nor to evangelize. It is to make life better, more worthwhile, to create the sound, the shape, the tale, the decoration, the environment that is meaningful and lovely and a joy to mankind."⁴

Art is to make life better, but it has that power only because it is delivering "prophecy" in some form - perhaps an exploded version. It need not be manufactured to teach, preach, or prophesy. The idea of the human integrity expressing itself meaningfully is criteria enough for art to function naturally in the categories of teaching, preaching, and prophesying. But this is where the philosophical problem of aesthetics arises once again. How can "integrity" be evaluated or measured? By a logic of principle, beauty,

truth, feeling? Which one first, and how? Such a problem as stated, cannot be solved. The artistic work itself organizes the priorities in its own way, with the guidance of the artist. Perhaps this is why the work always stands in a special relationship to the society and people it is born out of.

We can comment on that "special relationship." It is the relationships of critique, of reflection, of showing something new, of care demonstrated, of defiance, of concurrence, of irony, of pointing to higher spiritual values. European Medieval and Renaissance Church art and architecture comprised a rich repertoire of spiritual references that will probably never be repeated or combined in the same way again. Our collective world has changed too radically for that. Art once functioned to tell the world about God, keep the social world together, and offer fulfillment to the individual - all in one package. Cathedral, palace, and monastery have been its houses. Today the houses, the boxes, the categories, dissolve. Now if we observe some monstrous sculpture before a skyscraper in the city, we are filled with both a sense of awe and irony. We are bewildered and perhaps offended. We wonder why something so graceful is pitted in the middle of a group of such awkward shapes as those steel and concrete buildings. We are forced to use our own creative powers to accept its integrity. Children's poster paintings on a fence in a small city help take away the bad

meaning of "wall," defense. Andy Warhol has shown us life in New York City that lacks integrity in soup cans and boring "blue" movies. William Carlos Williams tells us all about the life and integrity and meaningful history of his city, Paterson (New Jersey) in his long poem of that name. Ezra Pound "unwrites" European and American history in his cantos. It is not like your typical history text: it has feelings. The sense of disturbance over the idol of our past and how we use it is uncanny. Pound showed us we can change the way we think so easily if we want to. But change - especially embodied in and suggested by works of art - is threatening.

"Oh to be in England now that Winston's out
 Now that there's room for doubt
 And the bank may be the nation's
 And the long years of patience
 And labor's vacillations
 May have let the bacon come home,
 To watch how they'll slip and slide
 watch how they'll try to hide
 the real portent
 To watch a while from the tower
 where dead flies lie thick over the
 old charter
 forgotten, oh quite forgotten"⁵

A too carefully written history can forget; the creative spirit at work in art always remembers. The Guernica mural will never not show the pain and horror of war. A history book or even a newspaper article could easily work to hide the full truth about war, depending on who or to what systems its loyalty is bound to. A work of art such as the Guernica or Henri Rousseau's War depends on a loyalty to truth, an ethical commitment that is mysteriously

immeasurable...to the dead.

That ethical commitment to my mind has to do with the commitment that comes from hearing the Good News. The truth shall make free the prisoners of the lie, someone else's lie. For I believe that the artist represents the fact that truth is discovered through uncovering our own lies, to reveal our own truths: this is what happens in the creative process. A person draws a picture from the model or from the imagination and learns something about himself or herself never guessed at before - the fantasy, perhaps, that holds him/her an inch away from participating in a greater, livelier reality. It is odd. There are psychological factors that can explain this occurrence, and this has been deeply explored by Rudolf Arnheim in his work (for ex., Towards a Psychology of Art). The intricate interworkings of human perception, cognition and feeling still have to be understood better before we can trust the reality that the artistic process is one of the most valuable human functions that there is. But the Christian ethical sphere and its relation to art and creativeness will also have to be deeply examined. And this would probably be a difficult and delicate thing to do. Except with a very broad spectrum of information and human integrity. Our rules of rhetoric have in some profound ways changed. Is Aristotle the only basic justifier of art in a Christian - no, Post-Christian world?

Let the work of art arise of itself, from its own con-

text, out of person or group of persons: that is the first criterion. Because we believe the creation is redeemed in Christ and creativity is pro-life by nature. Creativity implies handling materials that symbolize at least a pointing in the direction of healing and life. Obviously this can mean an artist might be justified in making a grotesquery. But it also means he is free to create that which is most sublimely beautiful. It all depends on the integrity, motivation, and health of the artist. And the artist, like any other person, depends on the society he or she moves in for nurture. He and she might have to tell the society it stinks for a lifetime before that society is able to look at itself and see that it does not have the health to support lively creative people who are about helping each other.

If the Church is to stand out in society as an ethical and spiritual leader, why does not it take a strong stand for the health of the society by being seriously supportive of artists in groups and as individuals? Or will the Church always be too deeply embedded in its own crippling institutional problems? Surely the members of Christ's Church understand the union of the Spirit and creativity? On this basis I believe the Church ought to nudge (at least) committed Christians who are artists into saying what they need to say. I think that is a responsibility She (or He) could deal with.

IV

Utilitarian Aspects of Art

It is a commonly held notion that there is a vast and unbridgeable gap between works of art, which are "intransitive," things in themselves, and things of use, which have a transitive function. Yet it is the same impulses, broadly, which characterize their making. These creative impulses are reduced to two major things in the mind of Hannah Arendt, the "capacity for thought" and the "impulse to trade."¹ It seems that what really separates a work of art from a 'useful object' are categories, - beyond that of transitivity of action - of who owns it, or what echelon of society does it represent, and how much aesthetic experience does an average person need in his work-day anyway? A useful object is always needed for something concrete, granted; a 'work of art' may not. But somehow wedded, the two mean wholeness, realness, usefulness, and beauty; the transitivity of shared ideas as well as of action. In other words, with a creative spirit at work in all of us, cannot much of what we make both 'intransitive' and 'transitive' be called a work of art? Simply, it doesn't seem that life has worked out that way.

The best that art has been able to do, it seems, is make some of life a little better for some of us, some of the time, and it offers an interesting commentary on the world we live in. And if it doesn't, the sensitive, educated

literary or art critic explains to us what it says about society. But, perhaps art could do better. We could all be more healthily involved in aesthetic experiences, and our 'art' - from birthday cake to cabinet making to fine painting - could better reflect that we hold life to be as sacred, precious, and wonderful as it is. Art and that which is useful have a fundamental, transitive, being.

"Thought is related to feeling and transforms its mute and inarticulate despondency, as exchange transforms the naked greed of desire and usage transforms the desperate longing of needs - until they all are fit to enter the world and be transformed into things, to become reified. In each instance, a human capacity which by its very nature is world-open and communicative transcends and releases into the world a passionate intensity from its imprisonment within the self."²

A painting transmits a thought or shares an idea with other people, but it is also a transmission or a sharing in itself. It may be 'only' to communicate a feeling or vision, but ideas are useable. A lawnmower cuts grass, a flowerpot holds plants, a machine makes shingles or candy or cleans teeth. Ideas 'do' things in transmission just as the motion of the lawnmower changes the complexion of the lawn. They may do less or more, depending on the person and the feelings, the place and time. Trading ideas is perhaps more like trading a potential, like a paint box, and then, selling several cans of paint is even more like trading a paint box.

What I am trying to say is that I care about the quality of dog food as much as I care about my appreciation of

Renaissance painting. I care about my peacetime activities as much as I care about what I am doing when there is war. Trading ideas is just as important to me as bartering products: perhaps moreso. By the same token, there is no reason why I or anyone else should not be enjoying my own work as well as the fruits of it. The creative spirit, the capacity for thought and the impulse for trade in art and work embody far deeper values than money can ever buy.

A useful object and a work of art may be one thing. A good useful table is usually made well and appears so, too. The same is true of clothes - or anything one wants to name. Things that are made poorly for use generally look that way. Here is where the word "appropriateness" rings true. At the same time this need not rule out the existence of non-objective or conceptual art which appropriately embody the communication of combinations of ideas, intuitions and feelings.

"Everything that is, must appear, and nothing can appear without a shape of its own...in its sheer worldly existence, everything also transcends the sphere of pure instrumentality once it is completed. The standards by which a thing's excellence is judged is never mere usefulness, as though an ugly table will fulfill the same function as a handsome one, but its adequacy or inadequacy to what it should look like...or rather the image seen by the inner eye, that preceded its coming into the world and survives its potential destruction. In other words, even use objects are judged not only according to the subjective needs of men but by the objective standards of the world where they will find their place to last, to be seen and to be used."³

This of course is a Platonic idea, that there is an appropriate or perfect form for each idea or item which closely

approximates that form.

It is often true in our society that that which is useful in our society that that which is useful or utilitarian is unbeautiful at the least and inhuman at worst, which is a bad thing to be when machines and modern processes were meant to be for the betterment of humanity. If work is, as Eric Gill defined it in an essay on Work and Culture in the 1930's, manipulating materials in order to make them serviceable to man, it also follows that human labor should be in accord with man's nature, or it becomes subhuman.⁴ We have come to see "worker" as almost a meaningless term at worst. The products of the great machines that those workers work often have the same meaningless, standardized quality.

Why does this happen, why is this so? Why is it that in a primitive society one can attain a sense of wholeness in one's work: the "worker" is an artist or craftsman who is conceiver, designer, executor, seller. This is true of small idealistic communities such as the Shakers, also. The modern industrial worker is not meant as whole at all. "Worker" is meant in an instrumental sense, it is meant as inhuman; the men and women are "simply hands or tools, not responsible for what is made with their connivance."⁵ They do not design, execute or own in any way their product. How can everyday work give any real meaning or wholeness to such non-people? Gill points out that human culture is

really a reflection of human living habits coming out of work - not just leisure time and hobbies - as we often tend to think of it. In a society where "fine art" is one thing and products intended for comfort and convenience and war alike often represent insensitivity, impediment or offense, questions must be asked. What is being said about the worth of the greater part of humanity, the longer part of the day? Is culture just a "pill coating," or is it a part of life? If it is a part of life it must be a part of the greater purpose, just as the products of work - creative and recreative purpose, as well as a useful function.

For after all, is it not the creative spirit in work, living, and culture which keeps life going on? It is the man who has some on going creative involvement with his work who is alive, and whose work is probable alive. Work, living and culture all go together, though they signify to us very separate things. We work and create culture both so that we may go on living; and perhaps where the utilitarian rises to the level of art is where work changes to flower and fruit - as it should. And the fruit of that work, just as the precious hours of the workmen, belongs to everyone. We all take some responsibility for it, and we all share in the fruit. Why should not the fruit be the joy of the workman as much as the fun of the rich? We all need our consciousness raised by a richer experience in our work and a more creative participation in our culture.

"In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced."⁶

Why cannot machines alone be left to do the hard, impersonal work? Why should not, on that basis, culture be a larger preoccupation? Beyond the need to trade for subsistence, the need for the exchange of ideas never diminishes; there seems to be a very special need for what we do in this life to be meaningful. And why is that so strange? Everything that we make and share reflects us, reflects our attitude towards creation.

In a primitive society it was easier for human work and creativeness to be united as one pursuit for the many; it provided perhaps more a sense of wholeness. In modern post-industrial society, wholeness represents the wedding of a very complicated set of polarities. Living the values that are given 'lip service' is another thing altogether. We rely on machines to solve many of the problems of mass production, yet much of that production has not meshed with the value of true human worth. For that, our work and production must be meaningful, and we must find ways to be true to our own creative vision. If not, we become forced to live out the negative side of someone else's vision, as mere extensions - workers, hands - like soldiers in a meaning-

less war. Art and a sense of craftsmanship means commitment not only to the making of a product, but how it is used or shared. Everyone deserves as many "votes" concerning his or her product as make up all the implications of that product. Naturally this isn't always born out in our own economic experience: what is useful is anything made any way as long as it fulfills the purpose: often, not always. There are some extraordinarily beautiful machines.

"...the characteristic works of our present technocracy at its best and at its worst seek the 'utile.' Thus we have the formidable beauty of the war planes and of the ballistic devices of various kinds. Thus also the gleaming and exact apparatuses, the beauty of which, being seen, pleases, even when seen from a dentist's chair. All such products of our technocracy derive their beauty from the play of light on shapes which seek an uncontaminated utility. Yet it is the same technocracy which achieves the vacuity and deprivation apparent in the thousand and one utensils and impedimenta."⁷

The problem is, teaching everyone to be artists and craftsmen in all kinds of work and cultural pursuits will probably not happen - unless people are educated early and convincingly enough to be creative and true. True to self and one's own vision. That could make a change. But it means people being loyal to their beliefs, willing to believe wholeness is better than division.

I have laid down a heavy requirement for art here: for if it is for the "betterment of life" as Mr. H. R. Rookmaaker has said, it represents a value. I would describe that value as the preservation and propagation of joy and

fulfillment in the creation. To maintain that value art has to be realized as more than decoration and not less than the pursuit of integrity, the expression of human integrity.

"So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, for that is his lot."

Ecclesiastes 3:22
Cited by Eric Gill

Expression in Art:

Towards Growth and Understanding

"The spontaneity of art is not one of opposition to anything, but marks complete absorption in an orderly development. This absorption is characteristic of esthetic experience, but it is an ideal for all experience, and the ideal is realized in the activity of the scientific inquirer and the professional man when the desires and urgencies of the self are completely engaged in what is objectively done."¹

There is no way it can be proved that spontaneity in art is not in opposition to anything, but it is worth believing, especially if one has discarded the old notion that the arbitrary orders of many social institutions - including the Church - are absolute. The notion is too confining. Perhaps it is most humanly healing to trust in complete absorption in a natural orderly development. This assumes personal and objective integrity, which is a sought for ideal in the Christian community. But this is a tall order, a high ideal. It can only be met if people are guided and educated in that direction. Church and school would both have to demonstrate the desireability of nurturing the creative spirit. Through this medium, men and women can be guided to love and rejoice in their work. For it is through aesthetic experience, as often as it is through sheer pain of growth and striving for understanding that we are brought to a discovery of God's love for man and thus to our own love of creation.

And, unless we come to those things, come to value things like aesthetic experience, we cannot begin to think seriously of art's important critique upon society, art's place in shaping culture and its dimension in work. We could not even dream of it helping in the building up of Jerusalem. A few idealistic people could hope to make a small beginning. It is necessary for all to be shown the work of the Spirit.

This is why I felt, as a Christian, it was important to demonstrate that one's knowledge of Biblical history comes more often than not through media that can be considered aesthetic experience: lively histories, the poetry of psalms, the songs of kings and great people, the revelations of the prophets, the parables. The prophets were extremely trustful of the "absorption in an orderly development" and the spontaneous way in which that was able to take place. We treasure second hand experience of Jacob's dream, Ezekiel's vision, the words of Isaiah I and II. They signify examples of God bringing himself closer to man, and man's enlarged perception. So it is important to pay attention to dreamers of amazing dreams - because we all partake in them by experience or by remembering them second hand.

In the sacramental experience of the Holy Communion, we have another spontaneous ordering of experience which we are the artists of - in the sense that we remember an unusual occurrence by repeating it in a certain artistic form. The

celebrated idea of redemption then plants in us a new idea - that all of life is renewed in Christ's act upon the cross, that Christ's life in or assumption of the body raises man's spirit to allow him "once again to perceive the spirituality of time and temporal things...The Incarnation...in redeeming nature, in simultaneously giving intrinsic worth to and informing it with transcendent meaning, makes possible, indeed demands the sacramental vision of reality." (See page eight of this paper). The whole sense of reality is thus charged with a sense of newness, and with a sense of urgency to build on it.

What I am suggesting here is that we take the creative aspect of that need for building seriously by seeing the possibilities in several directions. Expression is at the base of our aesthetic experiences, celebrations and revelations.

Expression has been called a ground for valuing art, and by Dorothy Sayers it has been called one hypostasis of the Holy Trinity. Expression is part of knowledge and understanding. Expression is the working of the creative spirit. The study of aesthetics in philosophy breaks down because aestheticians of a kind don't see why expression is valuable. They refuse to see that it is expression which gives us meaningful relationships and meaningful relation to what one more thoughtful aesthetician has called the

"vast scheme of the universe." Rudolf Arnheim cites expression as an intrinsic part of perception. It is expression which gives us the key to the care and education of whole people in a meaningful, whole community. Ruth Saw has observed that it is just the study of metaphysics and aesthetics which make up the disciplines best for the correction and development of complete persons.²

The expression of feelings is one of the tools we have in the transmission of understanding. The sharing of an understanding on that basis has a religious dimension when it becomes a communally shared vision. When that vision of combined feeling, intuition and cognition is committed to memory, say, by a picture, the event is "confined in a second form, thereby assuring its renewed presence and the effectiveness of its power."³ It becomes what is known as a cult image. It can have a religious function in securing and transmitting meaning in a given society of people - church or secular. Yet, it also needs to be interpreted, judged, perhaps succeeded, when the time comes, by some new picture or mode of expression. In other words art seems to be sacred in what it embodies as long as many people agree on it, or some group sees it as meaningful, but expression - the creative - is fluid and ought to be allowed to be guided by change. By not coming to idolize certain types of expression in painting we free ourselves to enlarge our understanding, too.

So "art" and the creative spirit or Spirit are not perhaps the same thing, but their complementary relationship is *sine qua non*. In some way the expressions integrated in the work are almost more important than the finished work, but the finished work helps us remember what was put together.

"It can make the depths of things resound."⁴

When new expressions have become meaningful, it has been necessary to accept those changes. Perhaps the history of painting is a good example of this need to express things and deliver meanings in new shapes and forms. We keep the old and regard it in a new way when we are ready to let go of the security it gave us for a newer, bolder vision.

I tend to side with those who favor art's alliance with the categories of knowledge, as opposed to those who see art as allied with the category of 'mere' feeling, especially when in that case feeling is assigned no transferrable value. I turn to the words of the philosopher, John Dewey, for a defense of my view.

"The sense of increase of understanding, of a deepened intelligibility on the part of objects of nature and man, resulting from aesthetic experience, has led philosophic theories to treat art as a mode of knowledge, and has induced artists, especially poets, to regard art as a mode of revelation of the inner nature of things that cannot be had in any other way. It has led to treating art as a mode of knowledge superior not only to that of ordinary life but to that of science itself."⁵

"What is intimated to my mind, is, that in both production and enjoyed perception of works of art, knowledge is transformed; it becomes something more than knowledge because it is merged with non-intellectual elements to form an experience worthwhile as an experience. I have from time to time set forth a conception of knowledge as being 'instrumental'...knowledge is instrumental to the enrichment of immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises."⁶

It is precisely for that reason of instrumentality that I believe art and knowledge are akin; a raw feeling spontaneously expressed cannot necessarily learn from itself or change or influence action. Knowledge and insight guided by the interpretation of feeling may bring some control over action. Hence, knowledge is a tool for bringing about change and control. Art as such has an ever greater potential because it strives to create a meaningful experience, and usually does. Any exercise of human judgment based on just 'fact' will be shallow and meaningless if it has no reference to the total experience or the wider, deeper, whole.

I am saying a "meaningful experience" is not just some thing that happens once a year at Easter, but that which can often give us a sense of connectedness with things of ultimate concern. Van der Leeuw has said "The recognition of the creation of God in the creation of arts....is a recognition in hope, not in fact. This is a bold statement to which things like worship, works of art and human strivings testify strongly. Because there are no empirical facts alone that will help us with the knowledge of God. Things like

meaningful experiences and works of art and acts of love making use of the functions of the imagination, feeling, and knowledge of the facts along with faith and belief, seem to be the stuff, the instruments we build with in preparing the Kingdom. The integrity of these things is heavily dependent on the grace of God, which is not easily explained by theologians or philosophers. Feelings are very important and so are facts, yet they don't begin to work until combined in the service of building communities, in making works of art, or to the greater glory of God.

I spent the larger part of this paper, (outside the constant difficulties involved in defining this complicated subject), trying to show how art realizes the creative potential of calling us into belief, how it has freed or might free us to exercise our creative powers in personal and communal growth, and how it brings to us in "meaningful experience" spiritual awakening, illumination, and nurture. It was too ambitious a task and there is much material that has been left unexplored. But I believe art and creativity are subjects which must be taken more and more seriously and articulated by psychologists, artists, theologians and ethicists in the future. For if the value of human potentials such as creativity are never fully inquired into, we may never know so great a joy - or have so useful a tool.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: Mentor Books., 1942, 1951). pp. 221-2.
2. Ibid.
3. Hermann Hesse, Narcissus and Goldmund (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968). pp. 289-291.
4. "Art" The American Heritage Dictionary, (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1969).
5. Frithjof, Schuon, Language of the Self (Madras: Vasanta Press, 1959). p. 122.
6. David Jones, Epoch and Artist, Selected Writings (New York: Chilmark Press, 1959). p. 178.
7. William V. Spanos, The Christian Tradition in Modern British Verse Drama: The Poetics of Sacramental Time (New Jersey: Rutgers U. Press, 1967). p. 27.
8. Andre Green, "Idealization and Catharsis," (Times Literary Supplement, fall, 1972).
9. David Jones, Epoch and Artist, (New York: Chilmark Press, 1959). p. 102.
10. Dorothy Sayers, The Mind of the Maker (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941). p. 112.
11. William Spanos, The Christian Tradition, etc. p. 50.
12. Rudolf Arnheim, Toward a Psychology of Art (California: University of California Press, 1958). p. 251.

CHAPTER I

1. Kathleen Raine, William Blake, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1960). p. 51.
2. Ibid., p. 188.

3. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). p. 13.
4. Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963). p. 156.
5. Ibid., p. 161.
6. Ibid., p. 336.
7. Kathleen Raine, p. 102.

CHAPTER II

1. William V. Spanos, The Christian Tradition in Modern British Verse Drama: The Poetics of Sacramental Time, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1967). p. 25-6.
2. David Jones, Epoch and Artist; Selected Writings (Chilmark Press, 1959). p. 167.
3. Ibid., p. 169.
4. Frithjof Schoun, Language of the Self, (Madras: Vasanta Press, 1959). p. 104.

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2. H. P. Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture, (London: Intervarsity Press, 1970). p. 80.
3. Ibid., p. 94.
4. Ibid., p. 243.
5. Canto LXXX, Selected Poems of Ezra Pound, p. 170.

CHAPTER IV

1. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). p. 168.
2. Ibid., p. 168.
3. Ibid., p. 173.
4. Eric Gill, Work and Culture, (29 Thames St. R. I.: John Stevens, 1938). p. 5.
5. Ibid., p. 9.
6. Hannah Arendt, p. 173.
7. David Jones, Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings, (New York: Chilmark Press, 1959). p. 120.

CHAPTER V

1. John Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: Capricorn, 1958), p. 280.
2. Ruth Saw, Aesthetics, (New York: Anchor, 1971). p. 20.
3. Gerardus Van der Leeuw, Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963). p. 161.
4. Ibid., p. 334.
5. John Dewey, p. 288.
6. Ibid., p. 290.

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